

SILLO

BUFFALO, NY

CITY

POST-INDUSTRIAL EPHEMERA SOUNDINGS, GESTURES AND POETICS

SILO CITY, BUFFALO, NY
(PHOTO - DEREK KNIGHT)



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SILO CITY,
BUFFALO, NY
(PHOTO - SHAWN SERFAS)

POST-INDUSTRIAL EPHEMERA: SOUNDINGS, GESTURES AND POETICS

CATHERINE PARAYRE, BROCK UNIVERSITY / REINHARD REITZENSTEIN, SUNY-BUFFALO, CURATORS

The exhibition *Post-Industrial Ephemera: Soundings, Gestures and Poetics* took place in 2017 at Silo-City, Buffalo, NY as a joint project funded by the Agreement for Scholarly Exchange and Collaboration between the State University of New York at Buffalo and Brock University, St. Catharines, Ontario. By this agreement “two leading institutions of higher learning that straddle the border along the Niagara frontier [...] encourage academic scholarship and research on various aspects of the Canadian-American relationship. For both our institutions, this international partnership is also a local one, as both institutions conceive of their local community as binational.” The Dean’s Office in the Faculty of Humanities at Brock University contributed additional funds.

Owned by businessman Rick Smith, “in the middle of what is likely the world’s greatest concentration of concrete grain elevators (only a few still in use), what architecture critic and scholar Reyner Banham famously called a ‘Concrete Atlantis’, Silo City is an experiment in historic preservation that potentially offers a new approach toward conserving and programming messy, post-industrial complexes and landscapes in weak market areas of North American cities” (Campo 316). Stuart Reid, then Director and Curator of the Rodman Hall Art Centre, St. Catharines facilitated the first contacts between both universities and Jim Watkins, property manager and passionate resident of Silo City, welcomed us warmly.

For the opening of *Post-Industrial Ephemera: Soundings, Gestures and Poetics* on 22 April 2017, visitors and artists were invited to walk across Silo City and explore the silos in order to enjoy a program of performances and artworks on view.

On 23 September 2017, some of the artists met again for a symposium at the Rodman Hall Art Centre, Brock University during which they could reflect on their participation to the project at Silo-City on the other side of the border. The present book forms the conclusion of over two years of work involving artists from diverse backgrounds.

We extend our sincere thanks to all contributors to the project – artists, experts, staff at Silo City and Rodman Hall, the Office of the Vice-President for Research as well as the Dean’s Office in the Humanities at Brock University, everyone at Silo City and at Rodman Hall, with special thanks to Derek Knight, Lauren Regier, Shawn Serfas, David Vivian, Cody Shriever, Leslie Boldt, and the Harmonia Chamber Singers.

Our thanks and gratitude go to Jim Watkins for his extraordinary kindness and his enthusiastic help.

The exhibition program below aims to provide a brief overview of the experience we shared.

WORK CITED

Campo, Daniel. “Historic Preservation in an Economic Void: Reviving Buffalo’s Concrete Atlantis.” *Journal of Planning History* 15.4 (2016): 314-345.

Buffalo, US and St. Catharines, Canada are neighboring cities separated by a river and a border, but they also nurture a strong sense of regional togetherness and cultural kinship. Colleagues in Sculpture, Arts, Comparative Literature, English Studies, Visual Arts, Studies in Arts and Culture, and French Studies at SUNY on the US side and Brock University on the Canadian side will share a common space at Silo-City, Buffalo between 22 and 29 April 2017. Coming from different places and practices, we wish to foster interdisciplinarity.

ANNOUNCEMENT

Silo-City welcomes you for an exhibition
featuring artists on both sides of the Niagara River
<http://www.silo.city>
FREE EVENT

Post-Industrial Ephemera: Soundings, Gestures & Poetics
22-29 April 2017
105 Silo-City Row, Buffalo, NY 14203, USA
Opening: Saturday 22 April (2-5 pm)

Together, we want to reflect on the notion of dispersal. A concrete monument, an overwhelming structure, Silo-City is also a crucible of ephemerality – sounds dissipating as they echo up the walls, the wind blowing through hollow buildings, the decay of objects deposited in the empty halls, the temporary presence of others, productive resonances of creative experiences. Is Silo-City a memorial? Silos are built to maintain large networks of commodity exchange for human and animal sustenance. Here, however, the workers are gone; the buildings are exposed to inclement weather; the projects we bring with us will disappear, be dispersed or displaced. Silo-City, despite its imposing constructions, invites visitors to become more perceptive to the transience of human endeavours.

We will plant colourful seedpods, install a neon sign in tribute to the Buffalo river that flows by Silo-City, crush words out of their discourse, scatter mourning songs for long gone lives, bring images, noise and stories from other places. We will capture the brilliance of a moment.

A follow-up one-day symposium at Rodman Hall Art Centre, St. Catharines will document and revive the exhibition on Saturday 23 September 2017. <https://brocku.ca/rodman-hall>

CURATORS: CATHERINE PARAYRE, REINHARD REITZENSTEIN

PERFORMANCE PROGRAM

MARINE A – 2-3:30 PM

Harmonia Chamber Singers

Catherine Parayre and Jim Watkins: *The Silo-Minder* (reading)

Reinhard Reitzenstein and Gayle Young: *ArbreTreeBaum* (vocal piece in 5 languages)

THE AMERICAN – STARTING 3:30 PM

Continuous Monument: *Silo Sessions at the American* (noise/drone performance)

PEROT – 4-4:30PM (ELEVATOR ANNEX)

Lauren Regier: *Where I stand is fair and square* (performance/grass seed & dirt)

ARTWORKS ON VIEW

THE AMERICAN

ArtIndustria: *Un beau fleuve* (neon sign)

PEROT (ELEVATOR ANNEX)

Catherine Parayre (assisted by Josh Dawson and Paul Savoie): *Ingrained Words* (18 posters: assembled fragments from texts by 37 writers)

Shawn Serfas: *Alloyed* (acrylic)

OFFICE (THE AMERICAN)

Akasya Crosier: *Likeness* (typeface study)

Casey Ridings: *Untitled Emotion* (acrylic paint)

Cody Schriever: *Vanity Case / Skeletons of Perception* (painting/sculpture)

Lucas Veraldi: *2mp* (inkjet prints)

Sophia Yung: *Voyage Voyage*

MARINE A

Jean Zhu: *bacteria* (video)

PARTICIPATING ARTISTS

ARTINDUSTRIA

Untitled (neon sign)

ArtIndustria+ was formed in 1995 by Derek Knight and Franc Petric, two Canadian artists who reside in the Niagara region. Motivated by the desire to work collaboratively, they have developed projects over the years with a focus on art, research and technology. Underlining their concerns with the dialectical relationship between ecology and industry, their conceptual models combine installation techniques and situational aesthetics to further examine the artist's role in post-industrial society.

CONTINUOUS MONUMENT

Silo Sessions at the American (noise/drone performance)

Continuous Monument is an affiliation of interdisciplinary culture-makers working among design, text, architecture and sound fields. Born from the ashes of a contaminated political landscape, Continuous Monument gathers to spatialize sound and signal in temporary, site-specific soundscape improvisations. Monument will perform at The American in Silo City as an acoustic inhabitation; live ghosts active in remnant industrial anatomy.

AKASYA CROSIER

Likeness (typeface study)

Akasya Crosier is a multifaceted artist based in Western New York. She is currently a senior at UB studying Studio Art and Communication. In her artwork, she focuses on effective communication skills, idealized spaces, and bright imagery.

CATHERINE PARAYRE (assisted by Josh Dawson, SUNY and Paul Savoie, Brock U)

Ingrained Words (18 posters: assembled fragments from texts by 37 writers)

Catherine Parayre works in Arts and Culture, and in Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures at Brock University. She is particularly interested in contemporary Occitan literature, as well as the co-presence of literatures and visual arts. She includes her four languages in her creative work.

CATHERINE PARAYRE AND JIM WATKINS

The Silo-Minder (recording, reading)

Jim Watkins lives in Silo-City and is our silo-minder/keeper. His passion for the arts and for Silo-City is central to our cross-border project.

LAUREN REGIER

Where I stand is fair and square (performance/grass seed & dirt)

Lauren Regier is an Honours graduate from Brock University's Visual Arts program, and is an emerging artist based in the Niagara Region. Much of her work is inspired by the notion of functionality and relationships between the industrial world and the natural realm. Interested in the experiential nature of contemporary art, her practice includes photography, installation, performance, drawing and video.

REINHARD REITZENSTEIN AND GAYLE YOUNG

ArbreTreeBaum (vocal piece in 5 languages)

Reinhard Reitzenstein has held over 100 solo exhibitions and over 300 group exhibitions globally, and has completed over 25 public and private art commissions. His work is represented in more than 50 public and corporate collections internationally. Reitzenstein has been Director of the Sculpture Program at, SUNY, Buffalo since 2000. He is represented by the Olga Korper Gallery in Toronto.

CASEY RIDINGS

Untitled Emotion (acrylic paint)

Casey Ridings is currently a Graphic Design student at the University at Buffalo. She is intrigued by the geometric nature of organic patterns; through a spontaneous and intuitive process she creates intricate paintings and drawings inspired by the exploration of her experiences and emotions.

CODY SCHRIEVER

Vanity Case / Skeletons of Perception (painting/sculpture)

Cody Schriever is a student in the University at Buffalo art department. His paintings and sculptures deal with human nature, and the structures of its self-perception. By combining various styles of painting and modes of expression he creates a complex narrative of the global condition.

SHAWN SERFAS

Alloyed (acrylic)

Shawn Serfas is an Associate Professor in the Visual Arts Department, Marilyn I. Walker School of Fine and Performing Arts at Brock University. His research interests include contemporary painting, drawing and printmaking practices concerning relational abstraction, environmental aesthetics, religion, the landscape as well as issues bordering abstraction and representation.

LUCAS VERALDI

2mp (inkjet prints)

Lucas Veraldi is an artist currently residing in Buffalo, NY. His practice examines the different methods of representation that exist within the realm of photography and explores the truth value that a photograph holds as a piece data that showcases life.

SOPHIA YUNG

Voyage Voyage

Sophia Yung is a Chinese American graphic designer and artist from Brooklyn, NY. Her most recent work involves the analysis of Asian American culture shock, language barriers, mixed martial arts and the role of financial capital in the precarious 21st century.

JEAN ZHU

bacteria (video)

Jean Zhu is currently a Media Study student at the University at Buffalo. She is both a photographer and a filmmaker. Her experimental films and straightforward photographs of everyday objects and scenes are noted for their color combination, explicit composition and rich content.

HARMONIA CHAMBER SINGERS (ARTISTIC DIRECTOR: ROBERT PACILLO)

Harmonia presents quality *a cappella* choral literature in a way that is accessible to all audiences. Their goal is to ignite an interest in familiar and unfamiliar choral works from a broad spectrum of styles and time periods. Each presentation should be an emotional, exciting, educational, and inspirational experience for the singers and the audience.

THE SILO-MINDER

JIM WATKINS (22 JANUARY 2017)

“My favorite season is wintertime. Everything is so stark. The light can be occasionally brilliant. It brings out the beauty of the silos grouped together as elevators, especially if you have a cold day and you have this crystalline snow that falls down and it's right about sunrise and there hasn't been any track made and the air itself has that sort of crystal light quality. It's really magical.

The other aspect of it – and I don't know how it can be addressed – is the soil, a mini-ecology within the system just because of how the different buildings are juxtaposed and the size of them. Soundwise you can play a lot of tricks on people because you can't necessarily trace from where the sound emanates, the way it moves through without disturbing. The sound – it just moves.

Don't rely on anything that can't take a beating in the weather because if you do you're gonna fail; it's just not gonna work. It's a harsh climate that way, regardless of the season. But that's also part of the challenge.

We had the development of a new material, that was concrete, which back in the 1900-1906 timeframe was really a brand new material and they were still experimenting with that. They came up with the concrete simply because the mass of concrete slows down the temperature changes and therefore it keeps the grain at a more constant equilibrium, which diminishes the chance of moisture and contamination getting into it. That is sort of another key to the site. It might not ever be said, but, I think, appreciated without being said.

The actual time when these were built was a period of time when you had large movements of immigrants coming into this country; there was bountiful labor, pretty cheap wages because if you didn't want to do the work, somebody else would take your job and, most of the time, in these parts, it happened during the immigration mostly from Ireland.

The construction, it was all by hand; I mean, you didn't have cranes then. Basically, a silo is a derrick, but I refer to it as a cell tower because it is the closest contemporary thing that we have. You would start, you see, with a field of flat boards, a few conveyor belts, an old shanty, and on that shanty you would see a little bit of steam coming up, with smoke. They used a steam engine to generate the power and then they built the cell tower and they continued to increase the height.

If you look closely, there are two vertical pipes; one was pumping water up; in the other one they used a screw inside a cylinder to move the cement up in the dry mold. At the top of the cell tower, people would be standing there as this would come in, hand mixing it. And once it was mixed, they would release it. It would go down to a tube and then would fill the forms on. And they did this 24 hours a day. Again, you had a plentiful of hard-working, hungry people – that's one of the reasons why it was able to be done that way. Again, it might not be overly known among people that visit the site, but it's the spirit of that which, I think, also permeates the site. There's something special here and it has to do with just that little background.

As a good friend of mine said the first time he came down – he just looked around, and he came down a couple of days later and he handed me an eagle feather. He said: 'Keep this on your doorway. This is a sacred spot.' Now I don't know anything more than that. They would not share that. Obviously, I wouldn't. It goes back, way back. A good friend of the site, Kevin McCarthy, had a great way of phrasing it. He said: 'Just think, round mounds of grain elevators were built to protect the sacredness of the native lands and now we are using it to further the traditions in the arts.' I sort of like that.

About working in the silos. Was there a danger to it? Oh yes, definitely. I think even right now the grain industry is one of the most dangerous jobs in the United States in terms of injury and deaths per whatever thousands of work hours. In terms of working conditions, I can attest to the fact that even in these days when they have dust-collector systems, there's a huge amount of dust generated just in moving the grain around, huge amounts. While explosions are rare, there is always the potential that to happen because you have the three essentials of air, of fine particle dust, and of source of ignition.

RECORDING AND EDITING: CATHERINE PARAYRE

REINHARD REITZENSTEIN, JIM WATKINS, CATHERINE PARAYRE

(PHOTO - LAUREN REGIER)



TREE CANTATIONS

REINHARD REITZENSTEIN AND GAYLE YOUNG

Tree Cantations, for solo voice with pre-recorded audio, was premiered by Reinhard Reitzenstein in September 2016 at the Indigo Gallery in Buffalo, New York. Two recordings of Reitzenstein voicing the names of trees in five languages were made in a highly resonant concrete structure at Silo City in Buffalo, then played back into the gallery, where they were accompanied by Reitzenstein's live vocal performance. He used a birch-bark horn to shift the directionality of his voice, and activate focal points through the space.

It was a logical next step to perform the piece at Silo City, further exploring the ways sound reverberates in a large cylindrical space as it reflects from the walls towards the centre. Alvin Lucier's key composition *I am Sitting in a Room* is an iconic demonstration of the influences of a room's acoustics on the spoken voice. Lucier repeatedly re-recorded a vocal text in the same space and assembled the recordings in order. Listening to them, one can observe significant changes taking place over a small number of repetitions. For *Tree Cantations* only the original recording was played into the silo, matched by the sounds of the live performance, again spatialized with the aid of the birch-bark horn.

The tree names relate to the early economic history of Buffalo, when it was a francophone community reliant on forestry, the city of Buffalo eventually becoming a hub for the transportation of forest products distributed by train. For this piece Gayle Young organized the names of trees in terms of the acoustics of vocal sound and assembled in a score (or script). Some sections feature tree names containing sustained vowels, such as m, n, and r. Others emphasize noise-based sounds like sh, ch, and f. Some feature long vowels, ah, oo, ee. There were times when Reitzenstein found he could fill the space, engaging in playfulness and exploration as he changed from rich resonant moments to punctuation with short syllables. As he was performing Reitzenstein observed the resonant frequencies of the space affecting him: at some points he felt his entire body resonating with the sound. This gave him energy, and he describes the experience as incredibly liberating. Possibly a sense of resonance was also experienced by listeners.

When voicing frequencies not in tune with the resonance of the silo Reitzenstein found it hard to breathe: the resonance of the silo was suppressing his choice of pitch. He found the short percussive sounds in the lists of tree names helped to articulate the space: the percussive attacks would echo in the space, and create a rhythm that added to the piece. The tree names selected for this effect contain the consonants p, t, and k. Reitzenstein observed that the noise-based consonants, sh and ch, felt like barriers because the sounds did not fill the space, and did not resonate.

Before making the recording, Reitzenstein had sung in the silos over a six-year period, gaining familiarity with the silo acoustics and exploring a variety of possible harmonies through different vocal techniques. We were working with a combination of resonance and reverberation. Long tones, high pitches, and percussive sounds in different ranges all produce distinct acoustic responses. Pitch slides (glissandi) are more resonant at some pitches than at others. Repeated resonant sounds build the reverberation, the resonance adding to itself and intensifying over time.

A significant aspect of the silo space is its reverberation time. Resonance is related to pitch, the frequency of a sound's vibration; reverberation is the temporal element, the time it takes for a sound to decay to silence. Silo City has a very long reverberation time, meaning that sounds last a long time. In comparison, the cistern where recordings were made by Pauline Oliveros and the Deep Listening Band every sound lasts 45 seconds. The players adapted to that element of acoustics through careful listening.

Sound waves are very similar to light in the ways they refract from surfaces. The length of a wave defines its pitch, and waves reinforce one another when they reflect off hard surfaces like concrete, creating resonance. The acoustic effects of a round space can be visually demonstrated by disturbing the surface in a round pan partially filled with water, creating waves. An active spot will appear at 180 degrees across the pan from the point of origin, for any sound not generated at the centre. In sound, that active spot is a loud spot. The position of the vocalist and microphone can take advantage of this to enhance resonance. Round spaces create simpler forms than rectangular spaces because angular shapes create more complex and diffuse wave reflection patterns. It becomes harder to activate a resonant focal point. This is why rectangular concert halls provide a full range of acoustic resonance rather than resonating some pitches at higher volumes than others, as the silo does.

There's some arithmetic involved with *Tree Cantations*. Sound reflected from the silo walls is reinforced if there is a whole number relationship between the distance and the pitch of the voice. Reitzenstein found it difficult to use his voice "against" this resonance. The acoustical phenomena of the silo led to his selection of pitches, chosen because of their resonance. Another arithmetical element at play is the length of a wave. A low-frequency sound wave will be lost, neutralized by its own reflection, if it does not have the physical space to complete the vibration, to reflect from the wall. These are some of the ways a space determines possible resonant pitches. *Tree Cantations* brings attention to the dramatic resonance inherent in this example of heritage industrial architecture, and to the highly reverberant acoustics of Silo City, adding a sound dimension to the visitor's experience of the site.

REINHARD REITZENSTEIN
PERFORMING TREE CANTATIONS
(PHOTO - LAUREN REGIER)



MONUMENTAL CADENCE AND ENTROPIC FLOW: SILO CITY AND SITES OF POST-INDUSTRIAL REGENERATION

DEREK J.J. KNIGHT

To arrive today at Silo City in Buffalo is to experience one of the rare post-industrial sites in the American Northeast. The remnants of an architectural sublime are all around us, captured in the formidable presence of the concrete silos standing twelve or more stories high and the overhead tracery of conveyor belts linking one operation to the next. The three complexes that make up Silo City, as well as two adjacent complexes that are still operational, are reminders of an exemplary period in American industrial architecture before the great economic downturn, which was followed by a wide-scale destruction or abandoning of these marvels of engineering to the entropic forces of time and nature. The future of the silo complexes now resides in the vision of owners such as Rick Smith, whose idea of developing a diverse cultural hub where music, theatre or art can be staged is consistent with urban regeneration elsewhere.

In seeking to examine the architectural, topographical and industrial components of Silo City, ARTIndustria proposed to borrow from the hybrid approaches of conceptual or site-specific art in imagining how the transportation or economic vectors once linked this post-industrial site to a global network. Formed in 1995, ARTIndustria has a record of contextual analysis, mapping or modeling paradigms in response to the cultural or ecological habitat, the architectural or spatial dimension. Principal is the challenge presented by an industrial complex of such sublime scale, where human activity is manifest in its historical operations and the passage of time is so dramatically etched in the physical or ecological parameters of a post-industrial or entropic landscape.

ARTIndustria's contribution to *Post-Industrial Ephemera: Soundings, Gestures and Poetics* took the form of two neon elements laid out on the cement floor in an isolated part of the multi-storey warehouse adjacent to the American Elevator. As the only source of ambient light in a building of this scale, it reinforced the absence of the very electrical grid that helped establish this stretch of the Buffalo River as one of the most industrially prosperous grain ports in the world. Along with the blinking neon elements that spelled out the phrase "un beau fleuve" and its reverse "evuelf uaeb nu," the gas-operated generator located outside the walls in the adjacent alley added a level of sound that rebounded throughout the cavernous building. This allowed for a synesthesia that combined visual and aural stimuli as well as alerting us to the sensation of being immersed in an unfamiliar, perhaps dangerous, darkened environment.

The neon elements were surrounded by a large pool of water that had penetrated the interior through the open windows or doors in the form of snow or rain. The interplay between the mirrored phrases "un beau fleuve" and "evuelf uaeb nu" was reflected in the surface of the water, as were the graffiti-covered walls and the overhead architectural components of the concrete ceiling. This temporary reflective surface had the power to both absorb and reflect all that was staged in this space, as if it were a contemporary version of the Greek omphalos.

This subtle interplay between the physical and reflective qualities of the twin objects was achieved through careful placement of the installation in the northerly corner of the warehouse, where a physical proximity between the installation per se and the words "un beau fleuve" alluded to the powerful flow of the Buffalo River, only feet away. Thus, the river operates as a central leitmotiv in our minds, and while the staging of the work manifests in physical terms, it may also be read as a collection of ephemeral encounters in which nuanced stimuli—visual, aural or textural—are the result of engaging this unique industrial environment as a fully immersive experience. From the wind off the river to the cold concrete underfoot, from the graffiti on the walls to the enveloping sensation of the sublime architectural presence, the discerning participant would alight on the idea of the unsettled relationship between the built and natural environs.

In order to approach ARTIndustria's installation, viewers must begin by negotiating their passage across the old rail bay, where grain was once loaded onto rail cars, before traversing the expanse of the iron-girded warehouse to arrive near the twin neon elements. This voyage allows them to experience an architectural space that is uniquely post-industrial.

* * *

The infrastructure of rail and shipping has left its distinctive footprint along the Buffalo River, but it is the monolithic architecture of silos and grain elevators that speaks to the scale of the utilitarian vision that was once at the core of the North American economy. Today the remnants of this architecture are found in cities such as Cleveland, Ohio, and Duluth, Minnesota, as well as Port Colborne, Ontario, at the entrance to the Welland Canal on the shores of Lake Erie, and Thunder Bay, Ontario. These silos and elevators were linked by the common purpose of serving an agricultural cornucopia in the American or Canadian Midwest that could also provide the world with one of the essential staffs of life. A generation later, with the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway in 1959, Buffalo's importance declined and its thirty or more silo operations became mostly redundant.

Hailed by the influential Swiss architect Le Corbusier in the 1920s as exemplifying the modernist principle of form and function, these grain elevators had once embodied a continental dream, tying in to a transportation network and an infrastructure of innovative engineering that inspired new utopian visions of the type embraced by leading European architects in the early twentieth century such as Walter Gropius, Eric Mendelsohn and Le Corbusier himself.

The strong geometric lines and volumetric forms of a new functional architecture that evolved out of the industrial practices of the grain industry also inspired artists. The likes of Charles Sheeler, Charles Demuth and Ralston Crawford, the latter who painted Buffalo's silo architecture, celebrated in their Precisionist-inspired paintings the inherent form and function of an American industrial genre that was also utopian in spirit. Visionary architects and urban planners saw feats of engineering as answers to their utopian ideals made manifest in the concept of the metropolis, and Buffalo was no exception.

The Pan-American Exposition of 1901, held in the city, was intended as a showcase of the industrial applications of electricity, promoting Buffalo as the "City of Light," powered by cheap and abundant electricity. ARTIndustria alludes to the power and instant spectacle of the electrical age by gesturing to the omnipresent Niagara Falls, where the Adams Power Plant first began supplying power in 1896 to two of Buffalo's newest elevators: the Great Northern Elevator and the Electrical Elevator. Until it was demolished in 1984, the latter elevator occupied the site adjacent to the American Elevator at Silo City, site of ARTIndustria's installation.

Niagara Falls was a nearby and abundant source of potential power for Buffalo, and when Niagara's flow was harnessed to generate electrical energy, the natural sublimity of the Falls gave rise to the industrial sublime in the form of the hydroelectrical infrastructure. At the same time, nature's subordination to technology raised fears of overdevelopment and industrial blight. One of the leading preservationists voicing such concerns was Frederick Law Olmsted, who was commissioned by New York State to create a plan whereby the Falls would be protected and preserved in their natural state. However, the Pan-American Exposition was premised on a pragmatism that demonstrated the power of hydroelectric energy generated by water-driven turbines only fifteen miles away. This was the wellspring of an industrial age that would help transform Buffalo into a major grain port, steel producer and car manufacturer.

* * *

ARTIndustria has demonstrated an interest over the years of its operation since 1995 in the infrastructure of conglomerate systems, be it the Welland canals or the power grid connected to the Niagara River, and the larger hinterland where utility, industrial or secondary architectural structures have spawned their own vernacular style.

Invited in 1998 to participate in the Castellani Art Museum's thematic show titled *Niagara: Traditional and Contemporary Works on the Niagara River and Falls*, ARTIndustria's installation involved pulling water from the penstocks on both sides of the river. This entailed gaining access to restricted areas of the Sir Adam Beck and Robert R. Moses hydroelectric dams. The water drawn from the penstocks was exhibited in two hand-blown glass receptacles, which were installed at the entrance to the Castellani Art Museum, on the external walls outside the main door. The water was left to evaporate; as it did, the receptacles were continually refilled over the course of the summer.

In 2002, on the occasion of "Power to the People," the second iteration of the ongoing CAFKA site-specific exhibit in Waterloo, Ontario, ARTIndustria partnered with Kitchener/Wilmot Hydro to install a prototype of an early street lamp in what was the first Public Utilities Commission building in Ontario. The idea of the installation, titled *Monument*, was to bring the viewer into close proximity to the lamp, to feel its warmth and hear the hum of its electrical charge but also to appreciate the scale of the hidden infrastructure behind the delivery of hydroelectric power. The building's interior was flooded with the warm glow of sodium light and was intended to celebrate the transformational power of hydroelectricity.

* * *

The challenge, as always, is to link field investigations to the museum or gallery, or, in the case of site-specific installations, to the context in which ARTIndustria's work is presented. In the spring of 2017 the decision to locate its installation in the former warehouse adjacent to the American Elevator was as much aesthetic as it was contingent on the building's physical relationship to the nearby Buffalo River, less than thirty feet away.

The river is a link to the storied past, an observer of the 325-year history of European settlement. It attests to the impact industrial capital has had on the natural environs of this stretch of the Buffalo watershed. By 1931 the City of Buffalo boasted no fewer than thirty-eight concrete elevators with a total capacity of more than 47 million bushels of grain, making it the largest grain port in the world (Kowsky 265-69). Since then, most of the elevators have been razed or abandoned to the elements.

In 1989 the Buffalo River was designated an Area of Concern by the Environmental Protection Agency, which said contaminated bottom sediment, thirty-three sewer overflow outfalls and forty-five inactive hazardous waste sites within the AOC were having a major impact on fish and wildlife populations and habitat¹. A Remedial Action Plan published in November 1989 called for a series of actions, completed in 2014-15, which included dredging the river bottom to remove sludge and pollutants in critical places.

* * *

The name Buffalo may be an anglicization of the French phrase "un beau fleuve," which translates as "beautiful river." This etymology evokes the pastoral aspects of a largely unexplored territory but also the sublime scale and force of nature mentioned in the earliest descriptions. Louis Hennepin's visit to Niagara Falls in the winter of 1678-79 was transformational. Hennepin, from whom the phrase is borrowed, illustrated and described this encounter in *Description de la Louisiane*, a chronicle of his North American sojourn published in 1683 (an English edition, *A New Discovery of a Vast Country in America*, appeared in 1698). The mural by Thomas Hart Benton installed at the Niagara Power Project in 1961 commemorates the historic moment when Hennepin views and blesses the distant Falls in the company of Seneca warriors and a few of René-Robert Cavelier de LaSalle's men, with whom he had set sail.

Other important local artists and writers, or artists of international stature, have long been drawn to the spectacle of Niagara Falls. The American John Pfahl has established a reputation with his photographs of the modern landscape, most notably his series of Niagara Falls and the shoreline of the Niagara River. *The Bottom of the Niagara River Seen from the Monument at Brock, Ontario* (July 1985) is an exercise in aesthetic reclamation. It counters everything we may know about today's polluted river, framing it in terms reminiscent of eighteenth-century Arcadian pastoralism.

It is fitting that it appears on the cover of Pfahl's 1988 catalogue titled *Arcadia Revisited: Niagara River and Falls from Lake Erie to Lake Ontario*, but as Deborah Bright, has suggested, Pfahl's photographs of the Niagara River over-aestheticize a site that has been ravaged by toxic chemical pollution (69).

Pfahl has also photographed Buffalo's industrial sites, among them its factories and silos, but the German photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher perhaps best represent the interest in documenting the buildings and machinery of the industrial landscape, first in Germany's Ruhr Valley and later on the American Eastern Seaboard. The Bechers explored different typologies, archiving in black-and-white photographs buildings or structures with express utility or industrial purpose. They referred to the industrial buildings they photographed, including the American grain elevator, as "anonymous sculptures," an idea in keeping with Le Corbusier's and the early European interest in these buildings as aestheticized or sculptural objects, to the exclusion of the debate that they were also sites of human labour. The North American grain elevators are presented by the Bechers as a series, with little to differentiate them from the fact that they conform to a typological multiple. In other words, Buffalo's silos are consistent in form or design with those in Minnesota or Iowa and are part of a larger infrastructure serving the nation's grain distribution.

The Albright-Knox Gallery commissioned a work from the California-based Robert Irwin in 2012 titled *Niagara*. It presents a kaleidoscope of fluorescent light that can be read metaphorically as a misty veil or as a torrent of water. This is closer in intent to ARTIndustry's interest in the ephemeral function of light. Light carries a poetic message, but the associations we take from the neon work of Dan Flavin, Bruce Nauman, Glenn Ligon and others who have used the medium to effect within post-structuralist applications of language are also instrumental. Flavin makes us aware of the apparatus, the neon tube and receptacle or fixture; Nauman uses the medium to play word games and make visual gags; Ligon uses iconic signifiers to analyze cultural bias, most notably in his references to the racial divisions between black and white America.

* * *

By extracting the phrase "un beau fleuve" from Hennepin's text, ARTIndustry implicitly is referring to how the natural world once appeared, long before it was subjected to the machinations of industry and the opening up of the inland waterways and Great Lakes to trade and eventual European settlement. While this may resonate with Pfahl's interest in reinforcing the early Arcadian spirit of the Niagara River in his photographs, the phrase captures something of the sublime power that Hennepin attached to the natural, unspoiled surroundings. With time this was supplanted by what we have called the industrial sublime, best exemplified when the Falls were harnessed as a generator of electrical power at the end of the nineteenth century.

While it may be overly optimistic to think this place could be restored to its pristine self, the industrial history of Buffalo's silos is as important a part of the material culture as the area's natural history. Despite the entropic forces at play, the superstructure of the remaining silos and elevators creates a distinctive silhouette of geometric concrete volumes and aerial conveyor shafts. If they are monuments to a storied past, they are also the sentinels of a post-industrial reality, or what the architectural historian Reyner Banham described more poetically as a Concrete Atlantis.

The Buffalo River remains a silent witness to all that has transpired along its banks, and after a century or more of industrial development it is the river's future on which the economic health of these structures may ultimately depend. The Lakers or bulk carriers have long since vanished from this vicinity and grain silo operations have all but ceased, with the exception of the Lake and Rail Elevator and Standard Elevator across the way. While remediation of the habitat is ongoing, with plantings on the site, environmental assessments continue along the Buffalo River and fish stocks have yet to fully replenish. One can only gesture, at best, in the knowledge that artistic intervention is not enough. But we see calling attention to the river and its watershed as a vital ecological component in the revival of this unique post-industrial landscape.

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Note

- ¹ "About Buffalo River AOC," on the EPA website (<https://www.epa.gov/buffalo-river-aoc/about-buffalo-river-aoc>).

ARTINDUSTRIA

Derek J.J. Knight and Franc Petric, two artists who reside in the Niagara region (Canada), formed ARTIndustria in 1995. Motivated by the desire to work collaboratively, they have developed a series of proposals over the years with a focus on art, research and technology. Underlining their concerns with the dialectical relationship between ecology and industry, they have developed conceptual models that combine installation techniques and situational aesthetics in order to further the dialogue between artist and society. ARTIndustria has spent the past twenty years analyzing the region's landscape and the impact industry has had on the local ecology, with a particular focus on the footprint of the Welland Canal corridors. Locally, you can visit our permanent installation at Niagara College, where we were honoured in 2000 with an inaugural commission recognizing the opening of the new Niagara-on-the-Lake campus.

THE AMERICAN - SILO CITY, BUFFALO, NY
(PHOTO - DEREK KNIGHT)





**AMERICAN
ELEVATOR**

(PHOTO - DEREK KNIGHT)



ARTINDUSTRIA, UN BEAU FLEUVE, DETAIL – SILO CITY, BUFFALO, NY
(PHOTO – DEREK KNIGHT)



ARTINDUSTRIA

ARTINDUSTRIA, UN BEAU FLEUVE
(PHOTO - DEREK KNIGHT)

ALLOYED
SHAWN SERFAS
(PHOTOS- THE ARTIST)









YELLOW THEATRICALITY ON THE EDGE OF WATER

CATHERINE PARAYRE

At Silo City, *Post-Industrial Ephemera: Soundings, Gestures and Poetics* was a theatrical intervention performed by the participating artists as well as by the visitors making their way through an exceptional architectural environment. On the one hand, the artists were invited to choose the place in one of three silos that best suited their artwork or performance. On the other, visitors were actively – physically – engaged in their interaction with several artworks and performances. Such synergy affirmed and reinforced the aesthetic value of our interventions in a site that exemplifies the post-industrial condition. At Silo City, the solemn, almost ceremonial theatricality of the opening event acted as a collective liberation from an environment that is both enchanting and overpowering. The sounds and gestures effected by visual artists, sculptors, musicians and performers were also iterations of poetry, a language that is perceptible thanks to its tenacious strangeness, which in turn makes the moment perfect, satisfying, intimate. In his dictionary of dramatic arts, Patrice Pavis defines poetry in today's world as follows: "Poetry has come to signify not so much a literary form or genre as lyrical strength in what we consider to be poetic. [...] In fact, today we understand the irruption of the poetical as the irruption of the poetical function, that is, artificiality" (186; my translation). In this sense, both theatricality and poetry informed our common purpose.

Ingrained Words / Mots enracinés, an installation of eighteen yellow posters showing creative texts by thirty-seven authors, embraced the idea of spring in the aftermath of a severe winter. Displayed on a rusted vat, which once contained grain, the posters toned up the various shades of grey and brown in the immediate environment. Yellow is a fascinating yet difficult colour to explain. Wassily Kandinsky noted its "tendency to advance toward the spectator," often experienced as an "intrusion" and a "dispersion of [...] power." Here, Kandinsky's image is that of a bomb "which blindly assails an object to burst aimlessly in every direction." In "any geometric form," yellow "disturbs its observer, hurts him but also stimulates him"; "aggressive and insistent," "it sounds like a shrill horn, blown constantly louder, or a high-pitched flourish of trumpets" (online). For example, in the elegantly sober *The Princess of Cleves* (1678) by Madame de Lafayette, the eponymous character observes at a courtly tournament that the man she secretly loves but cannot marry, wears yellow, her favourite colour. She interprets this as the signal of an illicit passion that must remain platonic because its consummation would be perceived as treason.

Another kind of yellow carries with it the connotation of base symbolism and evokes spiritual and material decay. Charlotte Perkins Gilman chose to name her famous tale of madness and despair "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892): "It is the strangest yellow, that wall-paper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things" (online). Her character, kept prisoner in her bedroom, a victim of indifference whose aspirations have never been acknowledged, claws at the wallpaper, the symbol of the unhealthy society in which she lives, in an attempt to escape. Also evocative of oppressive social and religious mores is Tennessee Williams' "The Yellow Bird" (1954). In the Southern United States where the story takes place, the bird Bobo appears to rebellious individuals whose souls have been dirtied by sin and promiscuous behaviour, if one is to believe the local preacher, as it does to Alma, for instance, who is constrained neither by physical surroundings nor social rules.

However, yellow also holds the premises of lively intensity. For the author of *The Theory of Colours* (1860), yellow "in its highest purity [...] always carries with it the nature of brightness, and has a serene, gay, softly exciting character" (767), while for van Gogh, who loved and responded to colours, yellow often has the puzzling beauty of "a shower of gold" (July 5, 1888): thanks to "a very glorious, powerful heat," sunshine is "a light which, for want of a better word I can only call yellow – pale sulphur yellow, pale lemon, gold. How beautiful yellow is! And how much better shall I see the north" (August 12, 1888).

The text fragments inscribed on the posters result from a fruitful cooperation between participants at SUNY-Buffalo and Brock University during the academic year of 2016-2017. Over several months, instructors Josh Dawson, Paul Savoie, and Catherine Parayre collected texts (1-4 pages each, in French or English) produced by their students and inspired by reflections on the environment and photographs of Silo City. Following a close reading of these texts, Parayre excerpted and collaged a few expressions from each in an attempt to highlight a need for storytelling in which the awareness of different continuities and disruptions in the environment, the coupling of nature and technology, and sustained attention to details and process are paramount. Privileging observation, these writings should be read as questions rather than statements.

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CREATIVE TEXTS

Ingrained Words / Mots enracinés (2017)

18 posters (assembled fragments from texts by 37 writers)

Catherine Parayre (assisted by Josh Dawson and Paul Savoie)

Before "the invention of the grain elevator in 1843 by Joseph Dart of Buffalo, [...] teams [of workers unloaded arriving boats,] ascending and descending a series of ladders, from ship's hold to wharf level and from wharf level to the tops of bins, carrying the grain on their backs and discharging it into the bins."
(From Reyner Banham, *A Concrete Atlantis: U.S. Industrial Building and European Modern Architecture, 1900-1925*, 1986)

In 2016, Catherine Parayre collected short French- and English-language texts by 37 individuals for her *Ingrained Words*. Broken into fragments and chipped into slivers, they evoke long-gone echoes of human voices in the empty silos where *Post-Industrial Ephemera: Soundings, Gestures and Poetics* takes place.

En 2016, Catherine Parayre a collectionné les courts textes en français et en anglais de 37 individus. Une fois fragmentés et disposés en éclats, ils évoquent l'écho de voix humaines dans les silos vides où *Ephémères post-industriels : sons, gestes et poétiques* a lieu.

perspectives with clear presentations
promising virtual reality
more people will want to buy one if the price drops dramatically
the laughing stock of the world the protest afterwards
fandoms are pushing

shipping can be considered
there have been attempts to reduce police brutality
there are going to be people (From Ajia Allen)

the days beginning at six o'clock a.m. with early morning commutes did i order bedsheets for my room
yet i should buy green ones or maybe blue ones would look better
the non-cancellable nature of reality is what we strive to find
we are the authors of perception and hallucinations
setting: two writers meet in a library and strike up a conversation

- a. fishermen catch fish farmers grow grain architects design structures builders raise magnificent structures
- b. a fisherman's work is catching fish a farmer's work is to tend to crops
- a. it is strange is it not
- b. please, explain to me why
- a. i see you are reading a book about mozart
- a. hahaha (From Pier Berkman)

clickbait there can be fears and irritations
behind curiosity entrancing cliffhangers
a dividing line a multifaceted light
their shell backlash
in a grocery store they put jokes on placards take the stairs more often than the elevator bolsters a strong gimmick
you don't know what you don't know (From Francisco Botello)

a series of non-spontaneous operations entirely unnecessary knowledge melding with the text
at least it is a start
writing is a collaborative effort and a static aside
dance and literature have similar figures
translating suggestions and physicality
slumped shoulders vehicles for a larger story
implore a field looking for materials
predatory postures create atmosphere
dance is like color (From Kira Christiansen)

a hotspot
all over the world cyber positive
a statement
skip school everyday
complaints low linked lives
overthinking only hurts you
in a bad way
problem solvers
breakthroughs don't happen in labs
the result brought many people to tears
i don't have a conclusion (From Alvin. K. Devasia)

translation
knocking along all sides of a hollow log
to find the thinnest spot
meticulous reading

paths at a very small scale
scathing version dactylic work
skewed devices rely on transmission a lot
elongated tools
6000 languages (From Michelangelo Di Virgilio)

astounding lives post status
downside skimming cannot be removed completely
ignoring faster
remain taciturn
glad
enhancement
like architecture
i have not decided yet (From Shoujing Fu)

a shifter who borrows
agreement and disagreement
barriers that have prevented
holes left by the path
supplement unintended purpose
whether it is the work or design
inconsistent roadblocks
interest of breadth
a quick pace
counterarguments
a certain number of signs before airplanes were used (From Stephanie Hahn)

surfacing evidence how we function
puzzle pieces can be discarded
fostering urban
conclusion
labeled quite grey and murky
everlasting documents
groundbreaking millennia
in the coffee house, a happy grandpa rolled in in his wheelchair
i much prefer to be given a concrete prompt
i have rewatched series multiple times
picked specific passages (From Brannon Henderson)

translators have faced struggles
translations only grew from
when you grow up in one area for most of your life
sarcasm is a blessing
flow often stunted contact from far away
cultures are just languages
they construct rudimentary
paper
striving to get as close as possible to understanding (From Cassandra Kinnaman)

the introduction of yellow
its definition remains a big question and follows headlines with a question mark
provides shelter
cliffhangers created catchy and delusional bottom lines
shaped objects full of shapes hexagon edged polygon full of circular shapes to trigger an ideal
medium
bread in this age of high demand
abysmal hacker
a kind of trap for over a century
a new network of neurons high in spaces
360 degree murals absolutely (From Manvijay)

in dulged indanger
always-on environment in the adjacent room
if you are on a date and food tastes worst
messages don't feel through variations in voice
fliers posted in local buildings exactly the same as everyone expected
playtime
down to 250 portfolios (From Syed Adnan Uddin)

silos
rouges dans le champ du voisin ; la noirceur nous enveloppe
gris et grands comme des éléphants abandonnés il y a quarante ans
des fusées pleines de popcorn en route vers la lune.
les moissonneuses-batteuses
on a semé le blé,
on a salé nos mains, la porte rouillée
l'ascenseur grince et s'effondrera dans la terre aux fleurs
les lumières linéaires dans notre camion on a mesuré les silos en kilo en écrivant avec un stylo
les silos entourés de vaches il n'y a personne très, très loin, une figure presque

Extraits de : Jocelyn Morse, Amanda Jones, Craig Maltais, Mariah Farrell, Karie McInnes,
Kathleen Sherwin, Samantha Hilton, Razmeen Shaikh, Katrina Gilfoyle, Christopher Belanger,
Amy Barlow, Jennie Montes, Aimee Hu, McKinlay Clark, Andrea Caruso, Dailia Frigault, M. Blanchette,
Alex Raso, Michelle Nazari, Chelsea Jackson, Maddy, Brandon, Keira, Kevin, Mariah, Alex Finlayson,
Bailey Mop, Kaitlyn Mickin, Stefanie Gugliucciello

Sunrise, sunset,
A tiny farm playset,
Daddy's little girl,
Grain silos by the river.
Childhood play cannot stay,
Papa and me on our way,
A never-ending road
Car on the side of a ditch,
My dad, a barn,
Familiar worm's eye view
Grass, dirt, rocks,
Taking photographs,

Him and her
Blue, cloudless sky,
Daughter waving goodbye,
Cool still breeze on a summer night (From Annika Mazzarella)

What a silo is not -
an idea
natural
bumpy
alive
emotional
experienced
useless
simple
empty
guarded
full

it is not a plant, it does not grow. You cannot drink it. You cannot cook it or shake it, it's not your dog or your family. It's not the sun or the moon, it's not made of snow or dirt of paper.

Fluid small organic moving alive a home a newspaper fabric cannot speak does
not hear brain body eyebrow a cow a crow does not go is not low is not dough
is not needy (From Defne Inceoglu)

If memories had a future, they would be filled with joy.

It's easy to live in a memory, just for a moment. Thundering steps, with purpose. I'm awake, eyes heavy and hands weak. It's early. I'm outside and the air is sweet. The ground is crisp, the dry grass crunching underneath my stride.

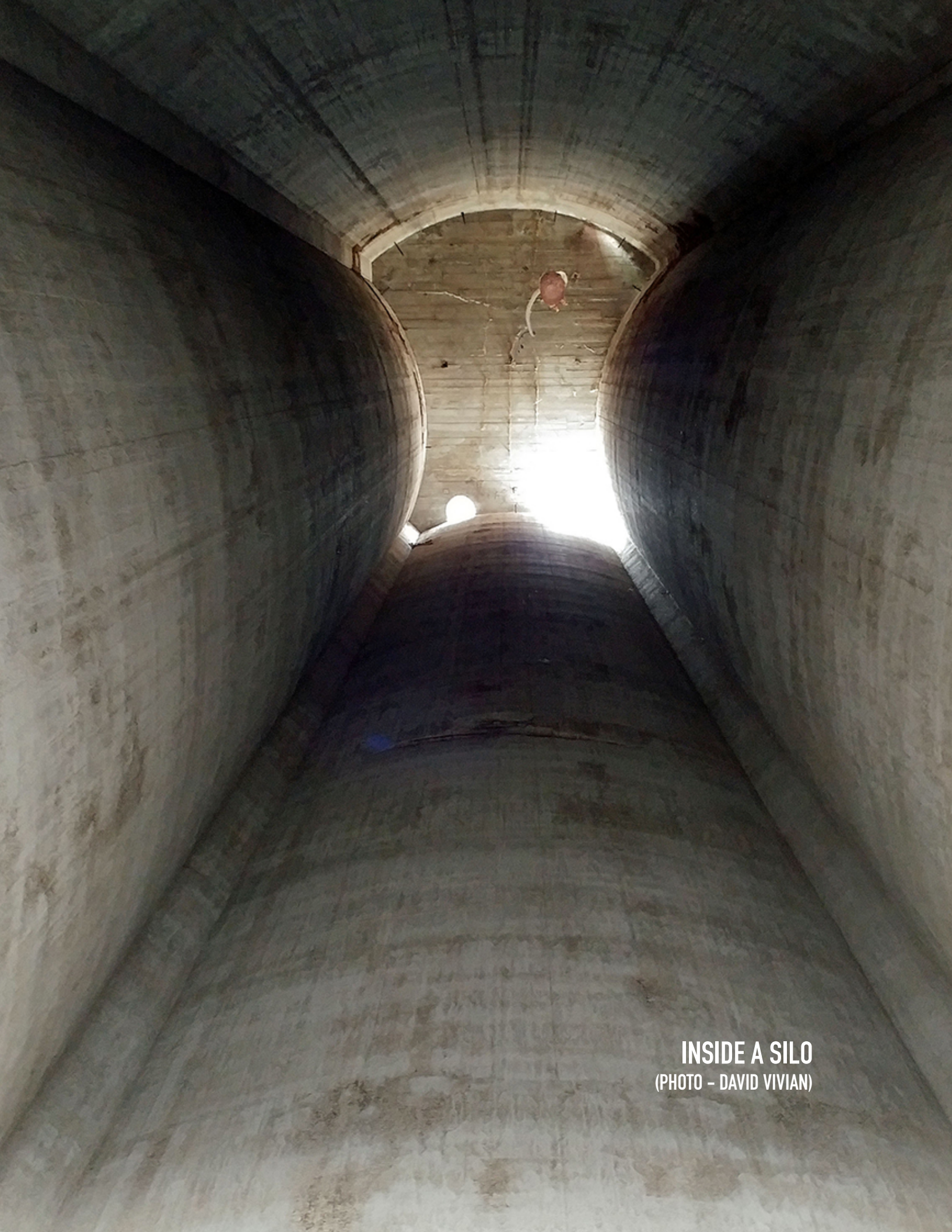
I look to a valley dipping in the east. The sun peaking through the tree line, red and orange shards of light bouncing off the dew-covered webs of nature.

Descending down the jagged grassy ridge, I pass rocks I played on as a child. Some days the rocks were furniture I'd lounged on in the sun like a lizard. Other days, they were islands I'd hop amongst, avoiding treacherous waters. [...] A whole world I know as familiar is out of reach. (From Emily Donaldson)

The death of plenty. No windows for darkness to glare from here, like empty eye sockets. No voids left by shattered glass and abandoned faith. Monoliths like sentries. Truly empty in the end. Strange, an empty thing with purpose unfulfilled.

Rust, tarnish, mould and broken rocks, encroached upon by both decay and greenery at once. No ancestors live here. Concrete preservation. Nature by its very nature defies preservation. (From Mark Allenov)

[illegible][illegible]



INSIDE A SILO
(PHOTO - DAVID VIVIAN)

WHERE I STAND IS FAIR AND SQUARE
LAUREN REGIER
(PHOTOS - THE ARTIST)







Post-Industrial Ephemera
Soundings, Gestures and Poetics
Silo City, Buffalo, NY

Exhibition catalogue

Post-Industrial Ephemera: Soundings, Gestures and Poetics (Silo City, Buffalo, NY)

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